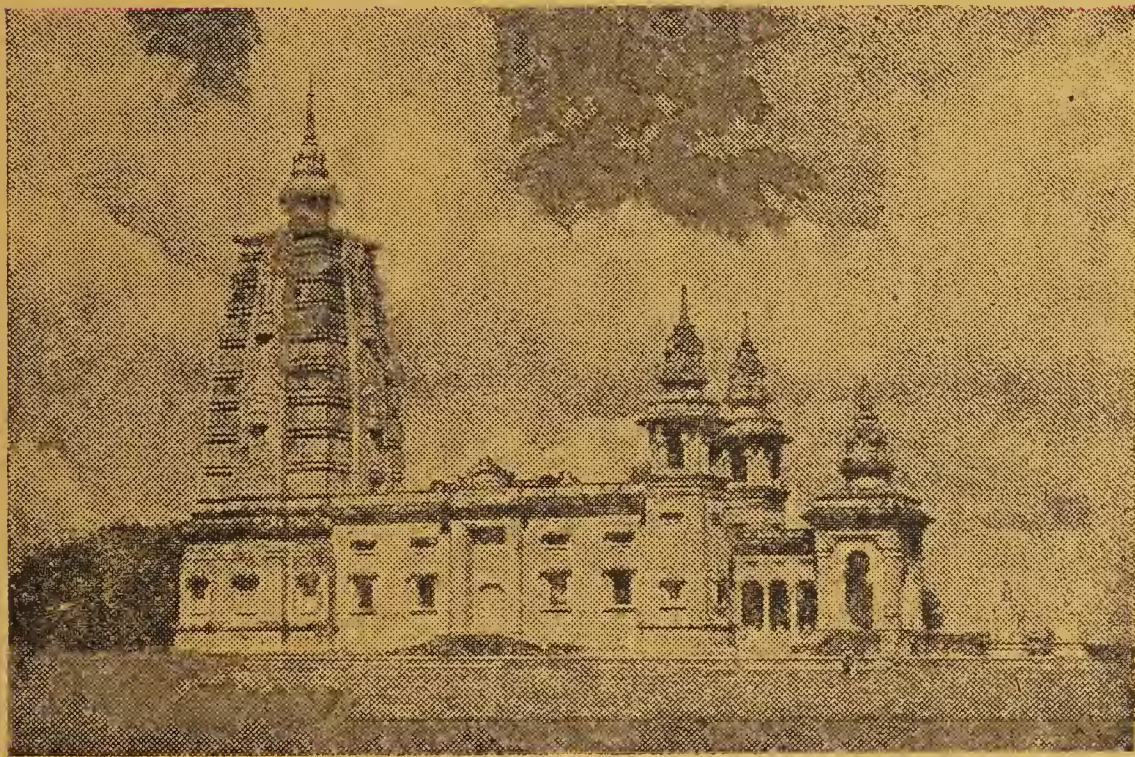


LIFE OF BUDDHA

IN FRESCOES

MULAGANDHAKÜTI VIHARA
SARNATH



THE MAHA BODHI SOCIETY

HOLY ISIPATANA :: SARNATH :: BANARAS

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LORD BUDDHA

BORN of a royal family, and rolling in comforts and luxuries, Prince Siddhartha even when He was very young was observant and thoughtful by nature. As the four sights of a diseased man, decrepit old man, a dead man, and of an ascetic confronted Him, He realised the impermanence of earthly things and forsook His family and home in quest of Truth. He first resorted to the path of asceticism, believing it to hold a key to the higher mysteries of existence. With Him were then associated five Brahmin disciples. Before long, however, He found asceticism useless and gave it up. The Brahmin disciples thereupon deserted Him and He now alone resumed His journey along the path of enquiry. One day, while He was meditating under a pippal tree at Buddha Gaya, the problem of existence slowly unravelled itself. He hastened to Banaras and entered the Deer Park at Sarnath to communicate His Discovery to the five Brahmin disciples who had left Him sometime before. He taught them the doctrine of the Middle-Path, which avoided the two extremes of self-mortification and self-indulgence. The First Sermon was thus preached here to the five Brahmins who were originally His pupils. The Wheel of the Law was set in motion. After 45 years of strenuous preaching of His new gospel, He passed into Nirvana at Kusinara at the age of 80. In the course of time Buddhism spread over the whole of Asia, comprising Ceylon, Burma, Siam, Tibet, Cambodia, Java, China, Japan, etc. and to-day there are no less than 500,000,000 people who profess the Buddhist faith.



Lord Buddha

Plate I.



The Bodhisatva Ready to Descend into the World of Men


The Bodhisatva Ready to Descend into the World of Men

IN the Tusita Heaven sat the Bodhisatva, surrounded by the brilliance that shone from the glory of His own exalted being. Around Him sat the devas—mute and adoring.

Many long ages ago, when Dipankara was the Perfected Tathagata, there dwelt in a cave an Ascetic, great in virtue and strong in meditation, Sumedha by name, who at the feet of the then Tathagata made the vow of becoming a Buddha.

And this Sumedha was He who was now the most exalted of the Bodhisatvas, and the time was ripe for the Great Vow to see its fulfilment.

It was therefore that the devas sat before Him in silent worship, for they knew that the wheel of time had brought the moment when the Bodhisatva would descend to the world of men, and there, as the Buddha, teach the Way of Deliverance.





The Dream of Queen Mahamaya

IN Northern India, at the foot of the snow-capped Himalayas stretched the Kingdom of the Sakyas, where ruled the good king Suddhodana, a man of virtue. His consort, the fair Queen Mahamaya, was a lady perfect in purity and nobility of mind.

Now lying on her couch one night in peaceful slumber, this lady had a wondrous dream. She saw a white elephant who trumpeted with a melodious voice, the sound of which spread over the four regions of the earth. She beheld him in holy awe, and while still she gazed this mighty one vanished within her own being.

Then came a feeling of great bliss upon the Queen, and a light appeared, which illumined the earth with a strangely mild flame. It rose high and higher, till it lit up the heavens, and transcended even into the dark regions of the land of waste, whither neither sun nor star-light penetrates. A great joy spread over the worlds of space: the devas rejoiced, and they, in the land of darkness, felt a ray of hope.



Plate 2.



The Dream of Queen Mahamaya

Plate 3.



The Birth of the future Buddha



The Birth of the future Buddha

AND when the time came near that the Glorious One was to appear, the Queen expressed a desire to visit her kinsfolk in her native city.

On the road thither was a grove, kept cool by waving Sal-trees,—the Lumbini grove. Fair indeed was this place abounding in fragrant flowers of many hues, while humming bees and gaily coloured birds flitted among the flowering trees.

And here the Great Event occurred: the Exalted One was born among men.

All nature rejoiced; a stately tree bent down and with its branches made a bower round the Queen as she stood in the garden. Thus without causing pang or sigh did He appear, the future Buddha—as a young child in this world—that world, which was awaiting Him. And earth and all the heavens were filled with joy.





The Distribution of Alms

THE news that a son and heir was born to him was taken to the King, and he was happy in the bliss of fatherhood. He made great feasts and distributed alms in plenty to the poor and all the land rejoiced.

Numerous were the prophecies about the future of this child. Astrologers foretold that a mighty kingdom was awaiting Him, which would stretch its dominion over the four regions of the earth.





The Distribution of Alms

Plate 5.



The Sage Asita sees the Child

The Sage Asita sees the Child

MANY came to see the young Prince, and among these was the sage Asita, a mighty seer to whom nothing was concealed. He lived near Kapilavastu and was famed for wisdom and saintliness.

He soon beheld the marks of Buddhahood on the body of the Holy Infant, and he predicted that this Babe, on growing to manhood, would leave the world and become a Prince of Wisdom and a Saviour of men, and this renunciation would be preceded by four signs,—*an old man, a sick man, a corpse and a monk.*

In due time the royal Child was taken in procession to Kapilavastu, where with regal splendour the naming ceremony was performed. Gautama Siddhartha He was named, and radiant He was in His infant beauty.

Under the Jambu Tree

IT was a beautiful day in spring, the earth smiled in joy and all life seemed happy.

The King took his Son to the ploughing festival, an annual ceremony.

The Young Prince beheld the blooming land, but underneath all this beauty He beheld another scene. He saw the perspiration on the backs of the peasants, He heard the stifled groans of the oxen.

Then sighed He and sat down under a Jambu tree to meditate on the evils of life and deep were His thoughts. The sun drew towards the west, and still He sat motionless, and while all the shadows shifted with the changing sunrays, the shadow of the Jambu tree, neath whose branches sat the Pure-hearted One, remained steadfast in its place.

Thus saw the King ; he was amazed and made obeisance to his Son.



Under the Jambu Tree





The Farewell to Wife and Child

IN due time the Prince was married to a lovely maiden, the Princess Yasodhara. In luxuriant palaces and blooming gardens they spent their happy days. A son was born to them whom they named Rahula.

But the Prince was not to be kept from His mission. He beheld the four signs that were destined to precede His renunciation. He knew in His heart that the hour had come and in the silence of the night He prepared to go.

Now came that memorable moment, when once again He went, the future Buddha, to the room where slept Yasodhara, and beside her their son, His only child. Tenderly gazing upon the scene so dear to Him, He remembered Yasodhara in their many unions in ages gone by. He felt again the great emotion that had grown throughout the long years.

Before Him lay the path of the homeless wanderer,—lonely and cheerless. Yet would He give up that which was so dear to Him, for the sake of the suffering multitudes. Mutely lingering, He stood for a while, then turned quickly and went forth.





The Departure

THUS in the bloom of health and manhood, forsaking all that the world can give in riches, love and happiness, the august Prince of men went on His quest.

Now called He Channa, His faithful charioteer, and bade him bring Kantaka, the peerless steed, strong and snowy white and glossy to the touch. Channa did as he was told, and the great Pilgrim, mounting His matchless stallion, rode forth, accompanied by Channa.

As He approached the well-guarded portals, they opened as if by command, and the wanderers passed, while deep in slumber lay the guards.

Now moved they on with the speed of lightning, and when at daybreak they came to the river Anoma, the Prince made halt. Here He cut off his silken curls with His sword and divested Himself of His costly robes and ornaments. Then, leading Kantaka by the bridle, He gave horse and valuables to the charioteer, bidding him return and give these with His greetings to the King.

But Kantaka, the strong, was still too weak to stand the pang of this parting. He reared himself and neighing with a loud sound, fell dead.



Plate 8.



The Departure

Plate 9.



Siddhartha and the Mendicants



Siddhartha and the Mendicants

NOW appeared Brahma and gave to the future Buddha the requisites for His vocation,—robe, almsbowl and belt.

Thus the Prince went on His road. He sought the solitude to consult with holy men on the things that be.

Among these holy men were two of great insight—Alarakalama and Uddaka Ramaputta. At their feet sat the great Searcher, and from their lips He heard the Philosophy of the Union with Brahman. He fathomed their doctrine, but did not accept it as final, for He knew there was a greater goal. He therefore left them, and they deeply deplored His departure.



The Five Ascetics

AFTER the Lord had been on His wanderings for a long period, He came at last to a place named Uruvela. There, in a grove, He met five Brahman Ascetics, Kondanna, Bhaddiya, Vappa, Mahanama and Assaji, who lived lives of extreme austerity. He joined them and they, seeing the greatness of His Heart, made Him their Master. But His body became so weak by the privations He underwent in their practice that, one day, He fell fainting to the ground. He now realised the futility of these austerities and self mortifications and therefore resumed normal life. Seeing this, the five ascetics deserted Him and left for Sarnath, Banaras.


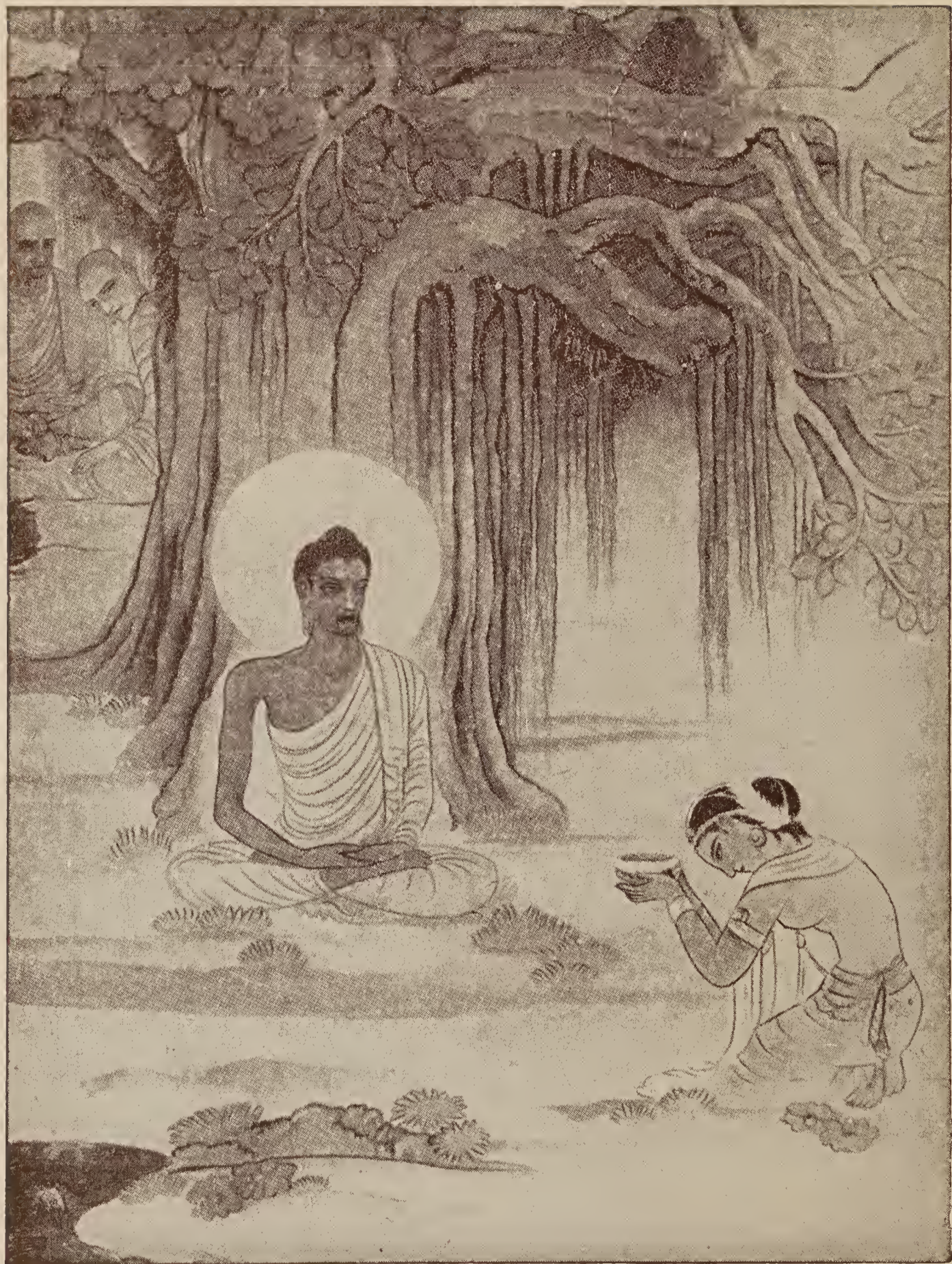


Plate 10.



The Five Ascetics



Sujata offering milk-rice

Sujata Offering Milkrice

SUJATA, the wife of a rich herdsman, had prayed of the gods the gift of a son child, which being granted, she vowed to make an offering of milkrice to the wood-god in the nearby forest.

It was the day preceding the fullmoon of Vaisakha. She prepared the milkrice with great care, and then adorned herself as for a festal. She now poured the offering into a vessel of pure gold and covered it with a golden plate. Taking her child into her left arm and placing the bowl on her head, she proceeded on her errand.

She came to the tree neath which sat the Lord of Hosts, radiant in the glory that lit up the place. The bliss of sanctity came upon her, as she beheld that heavenly vision. A while she stood aside in silent awe ; then made prostration, and placed the bowl into His hands, humbly praying that He might accept the gift.

The Lord looked up and heaven-love shone from His deep eyes. He blessed her and accepted the gift.



Enlightenment and Victory

NOW came the great moment when He proceeded on the Road of Life, that Road immortal, which led Him to the Bodhi Tree. And meanwhile all nature sang.

Mara, the Prince of Darkness, was watchful still and swore that he would thwart Him yet. He called forth his hosts from black and unclean places.

The Prince of Light perceived them, yet was He calm. Then Mara raised a whirlwind of a strength that neither forests nor mountains could have withstood. But unshaken sat the Lord. The most formidable weapons, showers of rock and burning coal, changed to garlands of sweet flowers, and as such fell at the Master's feet. Fair forms of female subtlety sent to entice Him with voluptuous charms, vanished like dust blown by the wind. An elephant of prodigious strength intended to harm Him, fell on its kness before the Lord of Love. At last Mara was subdued and his hosts fled in every direction, while ever unshaken sat the August Lord.

And when early dawn spread its rosehue over the Bodhi Tree, it was accomplished,—Enlightenment was attained and Buddhahood won, and all the world was filled with peace and harmony.



Plate 12.



Enlightenment and Victory

Plate 13.



The Wheel of the Law

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## The Wheel of the Law

NOW in the perfection of His Buddhahood He pondered in His heart whether amongst men there were those who would understand the Truth He had to give. His first thought went to the two,—Alarakalama and Uddaka Ramaputta. But with His divine eye He perceived that they had left the earth-world. Then His mind turned to the five, who, as ascetics in the grove, had accepted Him as their Preceptor and later deserted Him. With the eye of wisdom He beheld that they were ripe for the Great Truth, hence to their present dwelling place He now repaired.

But when they saw Him approach, they said, “He now returns to us, but we will not receive Him with reverent greetings.”

Camly He appeared, the Buddha, in the majesty of His own perfection, shining in the light of spirit glory. They beheld Him and marvelled, and not one of them remembered the resolution of a few minutes gone by, but, moved by a higher impulse, they rose and made obeisance.

He then spoke to them in words of love and wisdom. This was His first discourse, that immortal sermon, which has lived through the ages, and which set in motion the “Wheel of the Law”. They accepted the Great Truth and became His first disciples,—the glorious first five and this happened at the Deer Park near Banaras—Sarnath—a place ever dear to the Buddhists of all time.

Plain and speaking straight to the heart was that sermon, it contained the fundamentals of His teaching.

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Buddha preaching to King Bimbisara

AS the Blessed One went on His wanderings accompanied by holy monks, He came to Rajagriha where He stopped in a garden. Now heard King Bimbisara that the Buddha had come to his realm. So he set out together with a retinue of retainers to greet the Great Being, and as he came near the august Presence, the King made obeisance, and so did his retainers.

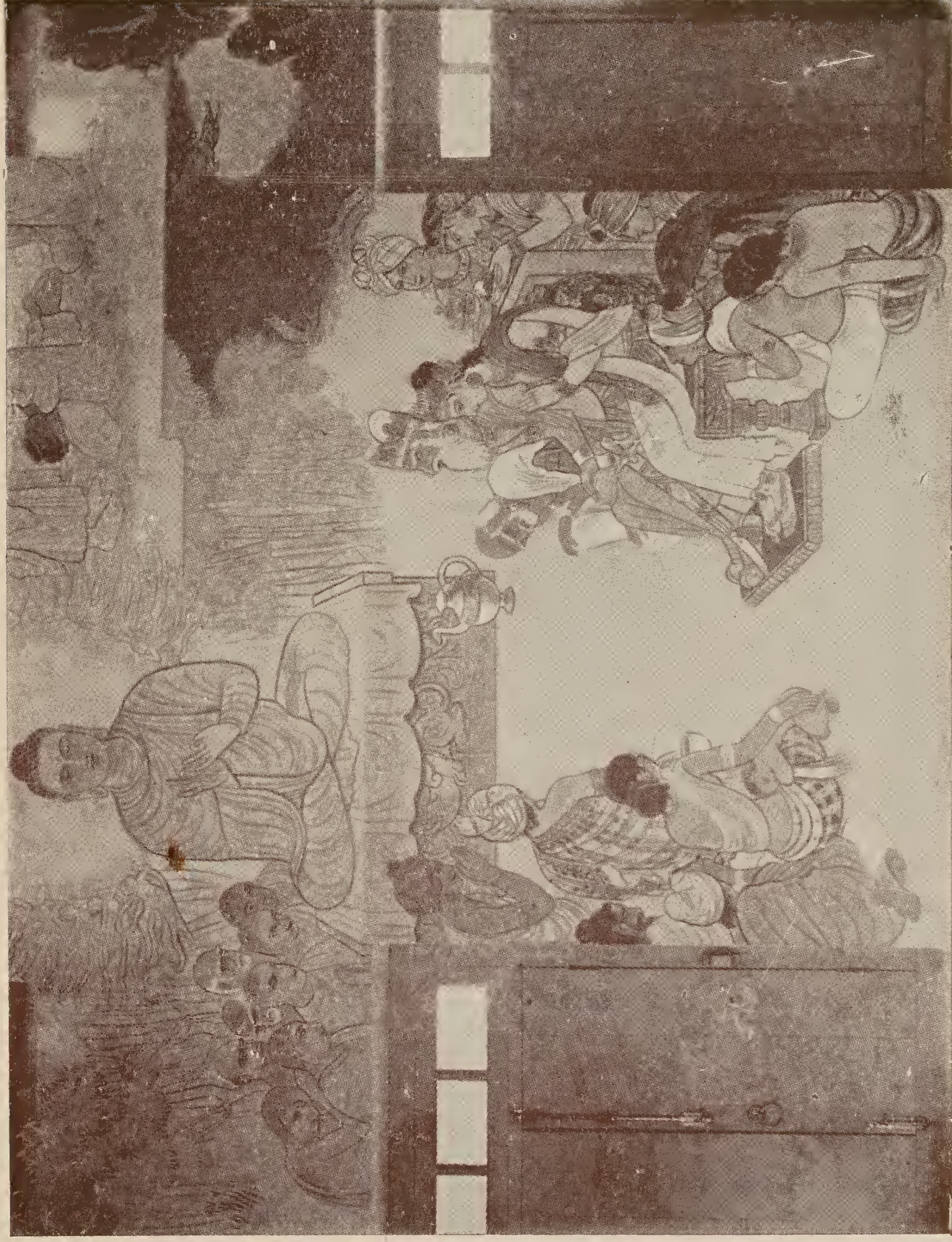
Among the latter was the Ascetic Kassapa of Uruvela, a former fireworshipper and with him were many of his disciples. He accepted the Teaching of the Lord and so did his followers.

Bimbisara who too had received the Doctrine of Enlightenment, now spoke to the Lord in gratitude and reverence. He said that for many years it had been his aspiration to meet the Buddha and from Him receive the understanding of the Law. That desire having been granted, he now desired to make a gift to the Blessed One and asked Him to kindly accept the Veluvana Park to which the Lord graciously consented.

Bimbisara entertained the Prince of Light in his palace, and ere the Buddha departed, He brightened the King's heart with His discourses.



Plate 14.



Buddha Preaching to King Bimbisara

Plate 15.



The Gift of Anathapindika

The Gift of Anathapindika

WHEREVER the word of the august Master went, it touched hearts, and rich men vied with princes in making gifts to the Sangha.

Such a one was Anathapindika of Kosala, a man whose coffers were heavy with gold. He once visited the Lord of Wisdom in the Veluvana grove. Embraced by the love of Him who was all Love, he took his refuge in Him. He now desired to express his gratitude by making a gift.

There was near Savatthi a garden of unexcelled beauty which belonged to the Royal House. Prince Jeta, the heir apparent, had made it his dwelling place. This was the grove the pious Anathapindika had selected for the Order and he made the Prince a sale offer.

Jeta, however, had no intention of parting with so desirable a place, and he demanded a price that he considered too high even for Anathapindika's means. "If you cover the entire ground with gold coins" he said, "you may have the garden".


Anathapindika at once undertook the work, but when it was completed, the Prince refused to yield. When, however, he learned that it was intended for a monastery, he agreed to surrender it, and now for half the original price.

Then was built in that grove a monastery magnificent in appearance and well to live in. And here the Buddha retired at times for a short rest.

Buddha and the Sick Monk

ON one occasion, while visiting a monastery, the Compassionate One entered a chamber where lay a Bhikkhu in great agony, suffering from a loathsome disease. And although there were many bhikkhus present at the monastery, not one concerned himself about the sick brother. The Buddha beholding his woeful condition, at once began to minister unto him. He called Ananda and together they bathed the sufferer and eased his pain. Then they lifted him from his unclean bed and placed him upon a comfortable resting place.

Thereupon He gave a lecture to the monks at the monastery. Reproving them for their neglect, He enjoined them hereafter to nurse the sick. "Whosoever serves the sick and suffering, serves me," He concluded by saying.





Buddha and the sick Monk

Plate 17.



The Lord makes Peace



The Lord makes Peace

DISSENSION, which led to the meeting of armed forces, this was the condition of two tribes, one of the Sakya race and the other of the Koliyas.

The quarrel had arisen over a small river which flowed between the two realms, and which, at normal times, yielded sufficient of its substance to irrigate the fields of both clans ; but this year the rains had failed, and the river was nearly dry. Each clan now claimed the exclusive right to use the small portion of water that was there, till dispute rose so high that it resulted in the calling out of troops.

In the peaceful solitude of His bamboo grove the Enlightened One saw all this, and He proceeded to the place where the armies were drawn up in battle array.

He called out the leaders and in his divine way began to reason with them, till they admitted that the matter would be made worse by colouring the small current of water with blood.

They therefore scabbarded their swords, and with slackened bowstrings, took counsel with the All Wise One and settled the dispute in peace.





The Homecoming

DURING the years that the Prince was away, there was mourning at the Sakya Palace.

But there came a day that brought glad tidings to Kapilavastu. The Raja's son and heir had at last been seen dwelling in the Bamboo Grove at Rajagriha.

The king now sent out nobles on prancing steeds to bring back his son home and to welcoming hearts. They went and told the Buddha that the King desired to see his son.

Then spake the Lord softly and with tenderness, "yes, I will go ; it is my duty to do so. Let none forget to honour those who gave him life, for in that life Nirvana may be reached."

And He came, and those who saw Him in the glory of His majesty, were spellbound, and He addressed His father and the many people gathered to greet Him and gave them the Jewel of the Law.



Plate 18.



The Homecoming

Plate 19.



Buddha's descent from Heaven after preaching to His mother



Buddha's Descent from Heaven after preaching
to His Mother

QUEEN Maha Maya, mother of the Blessed One, who on the 7th day after His birth, had left the earthworld, had ever since dwelt in the Tusita Heaven, but She had not yet gained Nirvanic consciousness.

Now thither went the Lord and gave her life everlasting—Nirvana.

And as He descended, after having accomplished His noble mission, the purest of the dwellers of space attended on Him, and thus surrounded by a suite of shining devas, He reached the earthworld, whence he had ascended.



Angulimala

IN the heart of a dense jungle lived a dacoit, fierce and brutal. From the hands of every victim he slew, he cut the fingers, and these he made into a gruesome garland. This ornament of horror he wore round his neck, proudly calling himself *Angulimala*,—the wearer of the wreath of fingers.

One early dawn as the Enlightened One looked over the world, He beheld this man of blood.

He went to the place and stood silent before the man of crime, who rushed upon Him with the naked sword, but the divine power of the Lord kept him at bay.

And when the man poured forth his vile nature in words, the Buddha began to speak to him. The wearer of the wreath soon stood abashed. He knew nothing, save that he was in the presence of an effulgent Light. The wreath of crime was flung away, and its wretched wearer now lay prostrate at the feet of his Saviour, where he received the everlasting peace.




Plate 20.



Angulimala



Devadatta and Ajatasatru

Devadatta and Ajatasatru

DEVADATTA was a near relative of the Blessed One. He was ambitious and wanted to surpass the Buddha. When he failed, his heart was filled with jealousy and in many ways he tried to harm the Tathagata.

He therefore worked himself into the favour of Prince Ajatasatru, the son and heir to the noble king Bimbisara. They made a plot and sent assassins to attack the life of the Holy One. As soon as the Perfect One saw them, He knew their black design. He began to speak to them, and His influence drew them to His heart, and they became converted.

Ajatasatru too felt the pangs of remorse ; he went to the Tathagata and laid bare his heart and the Lord of Mercy forgave him.

Devadatta, sick and forsaken, also resolved to approach the Prince of Peace. He had himself carried on a stretcher to the place where then dwelt the Lord. On the way thither, however, Devadatta saw his last hour.

The Blessed One, when He came to know of the incident, granted Devadatta the full forgiveness of His great heart.



Ananda and the Untouchable

ANANDA, one of the leading disciples of the Lord, walked on a dusty road one hot summer day. He passed a well, where a Matanga woman was drawing water. Impelled by thirst, he asked her for a drink. But the woman looked shy and in a modest voice explained that she was of low caste, and that one of his noble bearing could not take water from her hand. But the follower of the Lord of Love explained to her that caste was but a base illusion. "I asked for water, sister," he concluded "not for caste." She felt her own worth when she heard this and gave him the water with a joyful heart. She then learned that the recipient of the gift from her hand was a follower of the Tathagata. Therefore to Him she went, and He gave to her the immortal blessing of his Doctrine.



Plate 22.



Ananda and the Untouchable

Plate 23.



Maha Parinirvana of the Buddha

Maha Parinirvana of the Buddha

TO Ananda came the order for the last sad duty to be performed. “Ananda,” came the sad, sweet command, “Prepare for me the couch between the *sala* trees.”

Ananda went, and with a burning heart, performed his last love task. Then the World Conqueror laid Himself down on that couch.

And tenderly He spake to Ananda and others who came to see Him yet. The Mallas came, sad and sorrowing, for they had heard of that which was to be, and when He was asked, “Who will be our teacher when you are gone?” the Blessed One replied, “The Dhamma shall be your teacher. Follow my instruction, and you will be ever near me.”

He then continued His discourse in those divine accents that ever fell from His holy lips. In words of heavenlove, tender was His glorious heart, He gave His farewell, the last speech the world would hear from Him. “Strive ever with diligence.” These were the last words He spake.

Thereupon the World Conqueror fell into deep meditation and entered Nirvana, the Realm of Infinite Reality.

And at that great moment there arose an earthquake, and loud thunder burst from the sky.

MULAGANDHAKUTI VIHARA FRESCOES

WHEN some years ago, Mr. Kosetsu Nosu landed in India and began with paint and brush his work of decorating the walls of the Mulagandha Kuti Vihara, Sarnath, little could one realise what this mission would mean in the revival of Buddhist culture in this country, and the restoration of the ancient understanding between the different Buddhist countries of the world.

What Mr. Nosu has achieved in his decorative work at Sarnath is, indeed, remarkable. To-day when a Buddhist pilgrim reverently walks into the magnificent Vihara within the precincts of the historic Deer Park, he is struck with amazement at the mysterious array of light and colour on the walls of the sanctuary, depicting some of the great incidents in the life of Lord Buddha. These frescoes have indeed infused a new spirit into the history of Buddhism that was almost going to be forgotten in the land of its birth. In them the ideals of Buddhist art that reached their climax at Ajanta, have been brought to life again. The quiet but glittering sanctuary at Sarnath can easily be described as a replica of the world in which Lord Buddha, the great Saviour of mankind, played His role. The art of Mr. Nosu is so vivid and realistic that one feels in the presence of it as if one were actually witnessing those memorable scenes which are associated with the life of the Master in its different stages, culminating in His emancipation from the bondage of existence. The pictures on the walls delineating the Teacher's determined fight against the forces of Mara, His Triumph, the foodoffering of Sujata, the tender-hearted and compassionate woman, and various other scenes connected with the Buddha's realisation of the mysteries of life and existence, recall to the visitor's mind such associations as are destined to have, in an artistic setting, a profound spiritual effect on it, which will steadily influence his outlook on life.

The name of an English benefactor will go down to posterity as one whose contribution has made this achievement possible. This gentleman is Mr. B. L. Broughton, M.A. (Oxon.), an English Buddhist, who made a donation of Rs. 10,000 towards the cost of the Sarnath frescoes.

BOOKS ON BUDDHISM

For all books on Buddhism please communicate with the Maha Bodhi Book Agency, 4A, Bankim Chatterjee Street, Calcutta-12 or Sarnath, Banaras.

